THE FIRST CHRISTMAS PLAY EVER WRITTEN

"A WONDERFUL CREATURE IN WHITE GARMENTS AND WITH GOLDEN WINGS, BEARING A LILY."

SOFT and low, melodious, penetrating, the tones of a bell break the stillness that has fallen upon the little audience. Cowled monks step noiselessly to the sides of a wooden stage and draw the curtains. Lighted candles shine brightly in contrast to the darkened amphitheater. A great robed figure, august and majestic, wearing a triple crown, moves to the fore. He is attended by a court who sing and dance and toss up censers until he lifts his hand. They they fall mute and the silence spreads instantly to the people below, who had stirred and leaned forward in the intensity of their interest when the curtain parted disclosing the magnificent scene. It is a Miracle play—the first Christmas play—and it is staged in the cathedral of a medieval town in northern England. The great robed figure is the representation of God Himself. The singers are attendant angels. The scene is—heaven.

God speaks. In sonorous Latin is disclosed the order of creation and God's will toward man. Monotonously the words roll forth, and almost endlessly it seems to the awed listeners. But at last it does end and there follows a strange interruption, ludicrous, almost sacrilegious. An ugly creature, clad in goatskins and with two ram's horns on its head, capers forward, a clown, a buffoon. With strange grimaces and sinister contortions it asks and receives leave to become a curse and a plague upon men, then it departs as it came, grotesque and out of place, disappearing beneath the stage—the devil going down to hell. An organ peals from out the half gloom, the angels dance and sing and toss their censers and the first scene closes as it opened.

Outside the cathedral the old town is deserted, its streets snow-covered and silent. All its inhabitants, the visitors within its gates and the people from far and near around it are gathered within the cathedral to witness the first Christmas play. It is a solemn occasion; one meant to convey its impressiveness and teach its lesson for a distinct purpose. The cathedral is only part finished and the artisans and craftsmen who are completing it will draw from tonight's production of the Miracles inspiration for their work of decorating and carving and building.

From far lands and near these workmen have gathered. Skilled men from across the seas have been hired and brought here to exercise their skillfulness. Others have come because of their love for the art they represent, anxious for an opportunity to let it speak in the scrolls and figures and images of this sacred place. Still others are there from a sense of religious duty, and yet others to do penance for their sins by manual labor in such a cause.

All these sit within the cathedral. With them are the people of the town, the hinds and yokels of the surrounding hills, the tradesmen and craftsmen of the little village, together with their wives and sweethearts. Little children are there, half-frightened at times, then merry, and again saddened by the pathos they scarcely understand. It is a typical crowd of the time and the season, but such an one as was never before gathered, for Christmas has hitherto been celebrated differently in Merry England.

For days the preparations for the Miracle play have gone forward. About the partly finished cathedral there has been no sound of hammer or chisel or knife. In place of the workmen busy about the building have been monks decorating the interior with holly boughs and yew and Christmas green. The stage has been put in place, the curtain arranged and the trappings gotten into working order. It was pioneer work, and to our modern eyes it would seem strangely crude, but in that time it was destined to be a marvel for many days to come.

Somewhat of the grotesque again appears in the second act of the Christmas play, but it is short, the first two being chiefly preludes to that which is of the greatest interest and most pertinent to the season—scenes portraying the coming of Christ. The second act tells of the Fall. It is tedious, but thought by the monks to be necessary for the setting of the real story that is to be told.

Finally, the curtain is drawn for the third, and by the dim rays of a lamp Mary is disclosed, in her humble cottage, spinning. She sings as she works and all is quiet and peaceful. Suddenly the light on the stage increases, a rustling is heard and a wonderful creature in white garments and with golden wings appears, bearing a lily and crying, "Ave Maria, Gratia Plena!" Timid and confused, Mary rises but does not answer. Gabriel comforts her and sings about his glad message. Then Mary kneels and gives thanks to God and the angel disappears, leaving the room half darkened again. Clearly and joyfully there sounds through the church the voice of Mary singing the "Magnificat," while from the audience come the sounds of women weeping as the curtain falls.

Next is shown a shepherds' camp in the hills of Judea. It is wonderfully realistic, a fact which the countrymen present acknowledge in low murmurs of appreciation. Real sheep are bleating in the fold and the shepherds lounge about talking of the day's work. The simplest things of their life engross them—the death of a lamb, the whereabouts of a sheep that has disappeared.

As their talk ceases and they fall asleep, soft notes issue from the hidden organ. The stage is darkened now and the scene, with the dying melodies echoing through the cathedral, most impressive. Then a ray of

THE PLAY WAS GIVEN IN AN UNFINISHED CATHEDRAL

light breaks and grows in splendor across the stage and Gabriel is seen, on a platform so arranged that he appears to be in the clouds. The shepherds awake, frightened and confused, sheltering their eyes from the brilliant light. But Gabriel heartens them by waving his lily and calling upon them to be of good cheer, and then suddenly a choir of angels gather about him, singing "Gloria in Excelsis," and the shepherds fall down and worship. Still kneeling as Gabriel and his heavenly choir disappear, the shepherds chant a familiar carol, partly in Latin, partly in English, and the chords of the organ sound again, soft and low and distant, while the voices of the people take up the melody down in the body of the church.

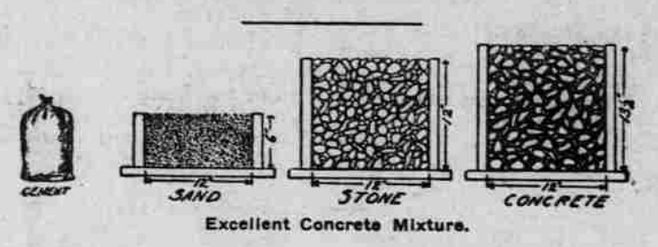
When the curtain is again drawn there is shown the stable at Bethlehem, the star shining above it. Mary is there, kneeling, and Joseph leans upon his staff. Before the ox and the ass is the manger, and in it, on the straw, clothed in jeweled robes, lies the child Jesus. The shepherds have followed the star and bow in dumb show while solemn music is chanted from a distance.

Then enters a magnificent array—the three kings come to do worship to the new-born Prince of Peace. As the chant dies down the roll of drums and the shrill of fifes and trumpets announce the royal cortege and the kings pass in stately review, each doing his obeisance to the child in its lowly cradle, each presenting it with some costly gift, each laying his crown at the feet of the Savior. Then the royal figures and their retainers join the humble shepherds, kneeling and worshiping in silence. Soft and low, then rising higher, comes again the melody of the distant angel choir, then it diminishes and dies away as the curtain closes and the lights go out.

So ended the first Christmas play ever written.

EXCELLENT METHOD FOR SUITABLE CONCRETE MIXTURE

Some Brand of Portland Cement Should Be Used That Is Guaranteed to Meet Standard Specifications of Government.



Excellent Concrete Mixture.

On account of its cheapness, uniformity and quick development of strength, the only cement practically used at present is the kind called "Portland." There are almost as many brands of Portland cement as there are of wheat flour. For farm work choose some brand guaranteed by the local dealer to meet the standard specifications of the American Society for Testing Materials, which standards are approved by the national government.

Cement takes water so easily that care must be exercised in storing it, says Kimball's Dairy Farmer. Upon the regular floor of a good building place timbers close together, as a support for a false floor, upon which the sacks may be piled.

Cement is heavy; do not overload the floor of the building by piling it too high, and do not store it against the side walls. Keep it covered with canvas or roofing paper. If once wet it sets up and is unfit for use. However, lumps due to pressure in the store house must not be mistaken for setup cement. Such lumps are easily crumbled and may then be used.

Concrete is a mixture of Portland cement and particles of stone. The stone should vary in size from pieces one inch in diameter to sand grains. By so grading the stone, the smaller particles fit in the spaces between the larger pieces, thereby producing the most compact and the strongest mixture.

The best stone for crushed rock is one which is clean, hard and breaks with sharp angles. Trap, granite and hard limestone are among the best; the use of shale, slate and soft limestones and sandstones should be avoided. The crushed rock should be screened on a quarter-inch screen to remove the fine particles. These small particles should be considered as sand; and, if in sufficient in quantity to make the proper proportion of the concrete, as is described later, enough sand should be added to produce the required amount.

Gravel well graded in sizes is at least equally as good for concrete as crushed stone. Bank-run gravel, just as dug from the pit, seldom runs even and rarely has the right proportion of sand and pebbles for making the best concrete. The mixture most suitable has one part sand to two parts gravel, measured by volume, in which all sizes passing through a one-inch mesh screen and retained on a quarter-inch screen are considered gravel. As there is usually too much sand for the gravel, it is both advisable and profitable to screen the material and to remix them in the proper proportions. gravel should have no rotten stone and should be clean, so that the cement may adhere to it lightly.

If it is dirty, no amount of cement will make strong concrete. Generally sand is clean, but if not it can easily be washed by playing a hose or flushing water upon thin layers of sand placed on a tight-pointed inclined wooden board. In size of grain it should vary uniformly from fine to coarse. All particles passing a quarter-inch screen may be considered sand.

Any good-tasting drinking water is suitable for concrete.

The tools and equipment necessary for making concrete in moderate quantities are already at hand on a well conducted farm, or will be useful afterward for other purposes.

The list follows:

Two square pointed "paddy" shovels, No. 3.

One round pointed tiling shovel or one garden spade.

One heavy garden rake.

One sprinkling can or bucket or one spray nozzle for hose.

One water barrel or one length of hose.

One sidewalk tamper or home-made wooden tamper.

One sand screen made of a section of one-quarter-inch wire mesh nailed to a wooden frame.

One measuring box or frame. See description further along in article.

One mixing board.

Two wheelbarrows with steel trays.

For farm work the following proportions are most suitable:

For concrete necessarily waterproof 1:2:4 or 1:4.

For all other ordinary purposes, 1:2½:5 or 1:5.

Such proportions of three parts, as 1:2:4, indicate that the concrete is to be mixed 1 part cement to 2 parts sand to 4 parts screened gravel or crushed rock; and 1:4 that it is to be mixed 1 part cement to 4 parts bank run gravel.

Measurements by counting shovelfuls is poor and uncertain practice. To avoid splitting of bags of cement, make as the unit of measurement 1 cubic foot, the amount of loose cement contained in one cement bag. Such measurements are made a very easy matter by gauging the wheelbarrows. For this purpose use a bottomless box holding one cubic foot. A shallow bottomless frame is also a convenient means of measuring. Such a frame, when set on the mixing board and filled, should contain the full amount of sand or one-half the quantity of gravel, or crushed rock required for one batch of concrete.

The size of the batch is dependent upon the amount of help and the dimensions of the mixing board or platform.

SAVING GOOD CORN STALKS

Authorities on Agriculture Urge Importance of Storing Fodder to Accompany Straw as Roughage.

(By R. G. WEATHERSTONE.)

Besides pointing out to farmers the importance of saving their straw, authorities on agriculture are also urging the importance of saving all corn-stalks, to accompany the straw as a winter roughage; thus making a saving in hay, the scarcity of which necessitates the greatest economy in its use. It is believed that the 1911 hay crop, all over the west, is much behind the usual ten-year average, and that next winter will develop prices at which farmers will think they can better afford to sell their hay, and feed the cheaper roughage, than to feed hay to stock. On this point, however, it will be well for the farmer to be very sure that he has a sufficiency of other fodder, before parting with his hay to the detriment of his stock. With the use of corn binders, the saving of fodder is not a difficult matter. If the farmer has not enough stock to consume his entire acreage of fodder, he will find others farmers who are without enough, and who have stock which it will be profitable to buy, to use what surplus fodder is stored from the corn fields. Save the corn fodder!

Value of Oats.

There are several good reasons for feeding oats; all authorities agree that they are easily digested and contain the necessary amount of protein to supply food for the muscles. That even the hull has its value in furnishing a sufficient amount of roughness to aid in exciting the saliva and gastric juice and thus aids the digestion. Many careful and experienced feeders prefer corn as the principal grain and oats only as a change. There can be no question as to the value of corn in fattening a horse, and it is certainly a much cheaper feed than oats, but after careful inquiry I am firmly of the opinion that corn-fed horses are more susceptible to disease; and even though they present a pleasing appearance, have not the muscular strength, the endurance or the power to resist disease of horses fed on oats.

OLDEST QUAKER CITY HOUSE

Residence Erected in Philadelphia in the Year 1692 Is Still Standing.

Philadelphia. — Although Philadelphia is known as the "City of Homes" and contains many public buildings of historic renown, the number of residences of the seventeenth century now standing are compafatively few. One of the reasons for the disappearance of the old landmarks is the fact that many of the old residential sections of the city have been transformed into business localities and the old structures have given place to modern office buildings and business houses. It is a curious fact that the oldest house in Philadelphia, and the only residence of size in the city with gable ends facing on the street, stands at American and Ionic streets, in the

Philadelphia's Oldest House.

very heart of the business and wholesale section bounded by Chestnut and Walnut, and Second and Third streets.

While this house is generally recognized as the oldest dwelling in the city, the exact date of its construction is not known. There are two bricks in the walls which are scratched with dates. One of them is inscribed "1701," while the other indistinctly bears figures "1692." It is upon the last figures that the claim of antiquity is based and the various historical societies of the city are convinced that the belief is correct.

Although no effort has been made by the various historical societies or the city to preserve it, the old building is in good condition, and from present indications, it looks as though it could withstand the buffetings of another century. The walls bear no cracks, and the plaster which holds the bricks together hardly shows its two centuries of wear. The joists of the two floors are solid and must have been of exceptionally well seasoned timber originally. In only two rooms has the flooring been renewed, and this was done when they were combined to make more room for the present tenant.

From all that can be learned the house has been in constant use since its construction, and its various tenants have from time to time brought the interior of the house up to modern ideas excludes the possibility of divulging any idea of the interior decorations of the colonial days. Very little is known of its former tenants, except that it was once the residence of Samuel Mickel, in 1735. He was the man who talked so discouragingly to Benjamin Franklin when he advanced the project of setting up a printing office in the city.

FAMOUS WAR ARTIST IS DEAD

Melton Prior Represented the Illustrated London News in 24 Campaigns and Revolutions.

London, Eng.—Melton Prior, who died recently, held the remarkable record of having served his paper, the Illustrated London News, as correspondent and artist in 24 campaigns and revolutions. There was no part of the world, civilized or savage, that was not familiar to him. He was acquainted with the prairies of the west, the pampas of South America, the jungles of Africa, the steppes of Russia, the rugged

Melton Prior.

sternness of Central Asian plateau, and he knew Corea and Japan as well as the country of Kent or Devonshire. He began his experiences as a war artist and correspondent in the Ashante campaign of 1873. He was in the Russo-Turkish war, the desperate struggle between Russia and Japan and the Boer fight for freedom in South Africa. He was an artist of ability and faithful in his delineation of characters and scenes.

Helps Explain Mine Accidents.

Washington. — Recent experiments have proved conclusively that coal dust which has been ground to a state so fine that it will pass a 200-mesh sieve will explode from contact with either a naked flame or with the arc of an electric current.

The Shadow of the Christmas Tree

THE CHRISTMAS festival has long been a beautiful one. The celebration of the natal day of the Prophet of Peace is fitting, and its sacred significance to the nations shows no signs of abatement. The period of glad tidings to the children properly quickens the hearts of adults at the sight of happy, guileless childhood in the midst of its simple pleasures, surrounded on all sides by the memorials of their tenderest affections. The joys of childhood are now the joys of all. It is the Christmastide!

This is the season when the limits of usefulness are unmargined. No errand of mercy is neglected—sympathy blankets the unlovely forms of envy and hate. Human-kind is sweet and gentle. And yet who could believe that somewhere in the sun of this apparently universal joy there is a cloud of sorrow far larger than a man's hand? Even so it is. Ah! you say you do not wish to discover it? Perhaps not; but it is discovered by multitudes whose lives it darkens with deeper gloom from year to year. It—can you believe it?—is the shadow of the Christmas tree!

Is it possible that the beautiful tree around whose branches dance the joyous feet of beaming children is responsible for aught else than happiness? Come with me here to the forest and ask the tiny, hungering, shivering forms crouching among the blackened stumps and rotting branches of the spruces, pines and cedars. Ask the chickadees, kinglets, crossbills, waxwings and other forest rangers among our birds what cheer on Christmas day. If inclined to complain they could tell you of desecrated home trees, stolen granaries, devastated shelters, their only proof from the terrible rigors of the awful winter nights, of the increasing hardships pressing upon them from all sides, and the gradual but sure depletion of their tribes. The birds may tell you of a thoughtless lack of mercy.

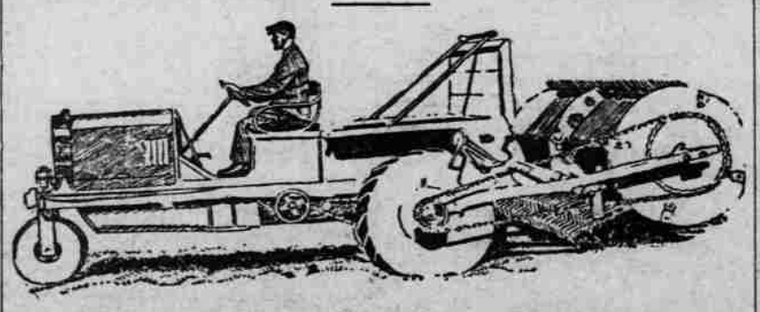
Ask the lover of trees and he will tell you of the early passing of these his favorites of the woods. He will wonder how it can be possible unwittingly to strike down the growth of twenty years—these trees are very slow growers—and the prospective beauty of a century or more, for the very questionable enjoyment of their dying hours for a day or a week, even when decorated with gifts and gaudy tinsel. He will tell you, perhaps, that at one time the use of these evergreens was the expression of a genuine sentiment by those who loved them, but that now cupidity for easy dollars alone prompts their being trafficked in. He will not fail to tell you of the utter disregard for and appreciation of tree life that has taken hold of the lives of city children as a result of the method pursued in the holiday season. He may say that a trip to the woods or the planting of a tree is an entirely wholesome way of providing a Christmas tree. Giving the birds a luncheon by the children will not be costly, and a real Christmas tree for the birds will make all happy.

He may ask if you believe the Creator is pleased with the terrible sacrifice in His name.

The practical farmer will tell you without the need of questioning that a very valuable line of timber is destroyed in the Christmas tree business, and that every particle of it goes to waste. His story of floods and drought, connected very properly in his mind with the disappearance of our forests, and his annual loss, adds still to the size of the cloud and relates it directly with the very children who are momentarily delighted with the glitter of the Christmas tree.

Does it not look then as if when we celebrate the birth of the Prophet of Peace we are at the same time warring thoughtlessly but needlessly on His creatures? Does it not seem clear that while we are endeavoring to create beauty in the home and church we are in reality working a vast devastation out of doors? Does it not appeal to you as being true that formerly the Christmas tree was used to decorate the home, school and church, whereas today we are making it but a peg on which to hang artificial decorations? How does the spirit of Arbor day comport with the Christmas tree traffic? From the economic standpoint as related to posterity can we afford to continue this vast Christmas tree custom?

MOTOR CAR SOIL PULVERIZER



An agricultural automobile with a peculiar type of soil pulverizer, mounted in somewhat the same way as the stern paddle wheel of a river steamboat, has been built by a firm in Switzerland for the preparation of light and dry soils which have been worked extensively, says Popular Mechanics. It is also used ahead of the plow when the soil is unusually hard.

The machine is of the three-wheeled type, the single forward wheel being used for steering. The two rear wheels are very wide.